

Congressional Briefing

The Legacy of Chernobyl: 1986 to 2006 and Beyond

27 April 2006

Panel II: US Government and International Response to the Chernobyl Catastrophe

Mr. Kalman Mizsei

UN Assistant Secretary-General and UNDP Assistant Administrator

Director, Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS

1. History of UN involvement.

Following the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear plant, Soviet Union did not request any help from UN until 1990. The early UN assistance on Chernobyl had a pattern of big needs and scarce resources to meet them. Donor fatigue was a challenge, with much more funds directed for technical assistance rather than for social needs.

2. Shift to development approach.

In 2002 the UN Report *The Human Consequences of the Chernobyl Nuclear Accident: A Strategy for Recovery* introduced a new developmental approach and shift from humanitarian relief to recovery and development. It emphasized the need to tackle the culture of dependency, lack of information, myths and misconceptions about Chernobyl as well as have a targeted assistance toward the most vulnerable groups of affected citizens. The UN-wide shift in outlook on Chernobyl and focus on forward-looking solutions helps reviving donor interest to Chernobyl Area-Based Development Programme in Ukraine.

3. UN Chernobyl Forum.

Most significant UN initiative on Chernobyl in past decade is UN Chernobyl Forum – a platform comprising of 8 UN agencies and 3 Governments (Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine). The main goal of the Forum was in finding “authoritative consensus statements” on health, environmental impact of Chernobyl and tackle the rift between science and popular beliefs about Chernobyl. As result, findings and recommendations were released in September 2005 which demonstrated that impact on health was not as severe as assumed; the only big proven impact of Chernobyl accident are thyroid cancers. Fear of radiation is a bigger threat than radiation itself.

4. The “way forward”: UNDP priorities.

As the way forward, UNDP identified three priorities in work on Chernobyl:

- **Information provision** to the affected population. Such information must be credible, accurate, digestible, reassuring and promote healthy lifestyles in addition to safe living in low-dose environment.
- **Policy advice.** Promote policies that support socio-economic recovery and shift from benefits to targeted approach directed at those in genuine need.
- **Community recovery and development.** Restore a sense of self-reliance through public involvement in problem-solving based on UNDP experience in Ukraine and Belarus.